

## Nation

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## Blizzard of the Century



*Not since 1888 has the Northeast suffered such a winter storm*

**B**uffed by winds of up to 110 m.p.h., a 42-ft. Coast Guard pilot boat, the *Can Do*, capsized and sank in Salem Harbor. The captain and the four-man crew were drowned. In nearby Nahant, Melvin Demit, 61, was lighting the furnace in his basement, when a wall of water crashed into his house and engulfed him. In Scituate, a raging sea swept five-year-old Amy Lanzikos to her death just as a rescue boat was bringing her to safety.

This was the scene along the Massachusetts coast last week, as a mammoth blizzard—the worst since 1888—slammed the Northeast, dropping from 1 to 4 ft. of snow in the latest blast from a winter of stormy discontent. Raging from Virginia to Maine, the hurricane-like storm killed at least 56 people, caused an estimated half billion dollars' worth of damage and crippled Connecticut, Massachusetts and Rhode Island for five days.

Providence was particularly hard hit. With main roads impassable after the 26-in. snowfall, Governor J. Joseph Garrahy ordered all Rhode Island businesses, except for grocery stores, to close. Not until this week was the state expected to return to normal. By comparison, the blizzard left New York City paralyzed for a mere 24 hours and entirely spared the Midwest, which was still digging out from a late January blizzard, that region's worst in a century.

At first, for the fortunate majority, last week's storm could be taken in good spirits and looked on as a welcome holiday. Cross-country skiers glided through city streets. Fraternity men tossed snowballs at sorority women on Boston's Commonwealth Avenue. Crowds applauded the impromptu performances of jugglers and clowns on Boston Common. At Boston Garden, some 11,000 fans showed up during the storm for college hockey play-offs. Many fans could not get home afterward and, sustained by free coffee and hot dogs, bunked down on the wooden seats.

Then the situation in Boston worsened. Two power blackouts cut off electricity for 100,000 people at the height of

the storm. In some working-class neighborhoods, looting broke out. Long lines formed at the few food markets that could open, and shelves were quickly stripped bare of milk, bread, potato chips, ginger ale—almost anything edible. Not until two days after the storm, when the major highways were finally cleared, could the city be resupplied with food.

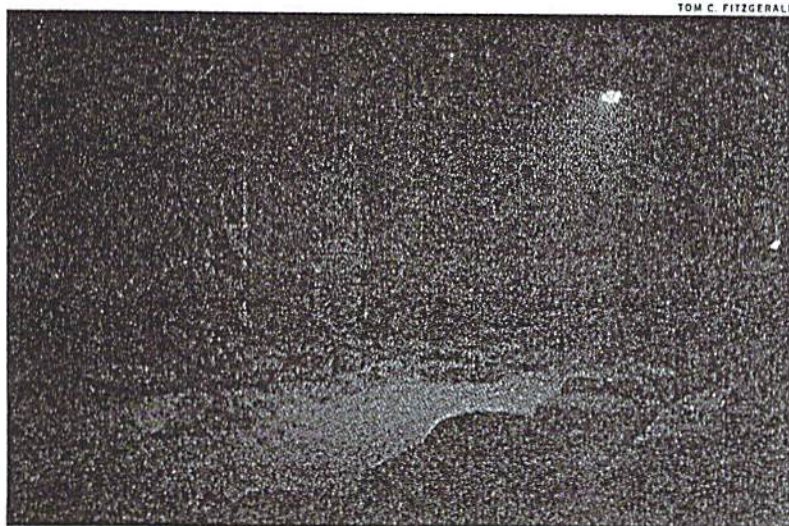
For coastal residents, the blizzard meant nearly 40 hours of sudden death

bestseller *The Outermost House*. The surf in Rockport, Mass., demolished a red fishing shack known as "Motif No. 1," a favorite subject for local artists. In Maine, the losses included three lighthouses and the amusement pier at Old Orchard Beach, where Louis Armstrong and Benny Goodman once played.

With roads in Massachusetts clogged by mounds of snow, Governor Michael Dukakis banned all public-bus and private-car travel, but not before thousands of motorists were already stranded.

To force people to stay home, Dukakis declared a three-day bank holiday. As cash ran short, public officials asked stores to accept checks and even IOUs from their customers. For the first time in its 106-year history, the *Boston Globe* was unable to distribute an edition.

Dukakis requisitioned every available snowmobile, four-wheel-drive vehicle and truck, and mobilized some 20,000 state workers, 4,000 National Guardsmen and 300 federal troops, some from Georgia, North Carolina and Texas, to help clear the snow. One of the first



Street scene in Boston's Dorchester section at the height of the snowfall  
A \$500 million howler that spread destruction from Virginia to Maine.

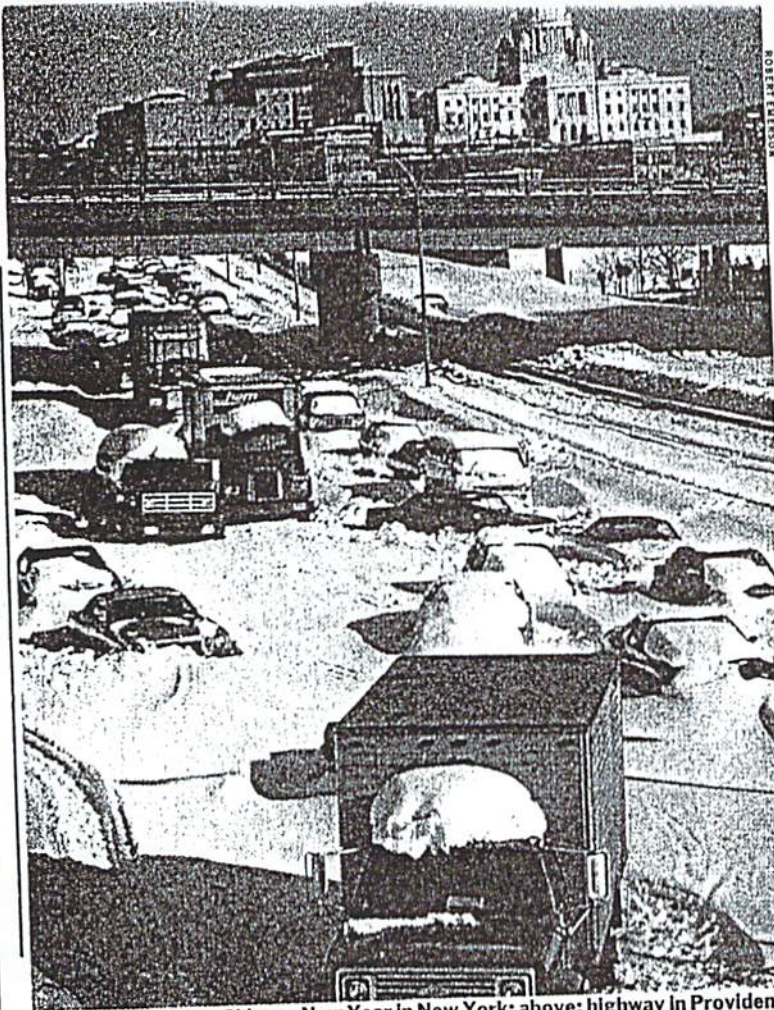
and devastation. Winds lashed the seas into 50-ft. waves that smashed hundreds of seaside houses and forced thousands to flee inland. In Revere, Mass., some people clung to the rooftops of their houses. "Twice each day, when the tide came in, I thought I was going to die," said Anthony Chiarella, who retreated to his attic with his dog Sergeant. In Hull, Teacher Martha Fingers and her family rested in shifts so that they would not be caught unaware if the house was about to be swept away. "We didn't really sleep," she told rescuers. "The waves kept rocking the house."

**T**he sidewheeler *Peter Stuyvesant*, which formed part of Anthony's Pier Four Restaurant, was torn from its concrete pilings and wrecked in Boston Harbor. Outside of Boston, the storm destroyed some of New England's best-known landmarks. Among them was the seaside dwelling in Eastham on Cape Cod that was made famous by Naturalist Henry Beston's 1928

tasks was to open a runway at Logan International Airport so that the Army could fly in additional front-end loaders, dump trucks and emergency electrical generators.

Officials at the National Weather Service in Washington blamed the storm on a system of intense high pressure that has been meandering back and forth across Canada all winter. A similar system, known to forecasters as a "blocking high," caused California's two-year drought. This winter the Canadian high has been spraying snow and cold in seemingly haphazard, unpredictable directions, plunging temperatures to the 20s in Atlanta and setting snowfall records in places like Valdez, Alaska, which has had more than 63 in. so far. Meteorologists frankly admit that they understand very little about "blocking highs"—except that this one will surely bring more cold and snow. Advises James O'Connor, acting chief of the National Meteorological Center: "Don't put your long Johns in mothballs."





Above: wreckage on Fire Island, N.Y.; below: flooded street in Revere



Below: rescue in Revere



Left: Digging out a Boston restaurant; below: getting around in

